A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

Febr. 26th 167½.

By *John Tillotson*, D. D. Dean of *Canterbury*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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PSAL. 119. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

THE two great cauſes of the ruine of men, are *Infidelity* and *want of conſideration.* Some do not believe the principles of Religion, or at leaſt have by arguing againſt them rendered them ſo doubtful to themſelves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them: But theſe are but a very ſmall part of mankind, in compariſon of thoſe

who periſh for want of conſidering theſe things. For moſt men take the principles of Religion for granted, *That there is a God*, and a *Providence*, and a *State of Rewards and Puniſhments after this life*, and never entertained any conſiderable doubt in their minds to the contrary: But for all this, they never attended to the proper and natural conſequences of theſe principles, nor applyed them to their own caſe; They never ſeriouſly conſidered the notorious inconſiſtency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of perſons they ought to be who are verily perſwaded of the truth of theſe things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and conſiders the neceſſary and immediate conſequences of ſuch a perſwaſion, can think it ſafe to affront Him by a wicked life: No man that believes the infinite happineſs and miſery of another world, and conſiders withall that one of theſe ſhall certainly be his portion, according as he demeans himſelf in this preſent life, can think it indifferent

rent what courſe he takes. Men may thruſt away theſe thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man that enters into the ſerious conſideration of theſe matters, can poſſibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miſerable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart; would they but ſeriouſly conſider the conſequences of a wicked life, they would ſee ſo plain reaſon and ſo urgent a neceſſity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This courſe *David* took here in the Text, and he found the happy ſucceſs of it; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.*

In which Words there are theſe two things conſiderable.

I. The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways.*

II. The

II. The ſucceſs of this courſe. It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

Theſe are the two heads of my following diſcourſe; which when I have ſpoken to, I ſhall endeavour to perſwade my ſelf and you to take the ſame courſe which *David* here did, and God grant that it may have the ſame effect.

I. We will conſider *the courſe which* David *here took* for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways*, or, as the words are rendered in our old Tranſlation, *I called mine own ways to remembrance.* And this may either ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of his life, reſpecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it: Or elſe, which is more probable, it may ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of his life; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance. Neither of theſe ſenſes

ſenſes can be much amiſs in order to the effect mentioned in the Text, *viz.* the reformation and amendment of our lives; and therefore neither of them can reaſonably be excluded, though I ſhall principally inſiſt upon the later.

1. This *thinking of our ways* may ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of our lives, reſpecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For *Way* is a Metaphorical word, denoting the courſe of a mans life and actions. *I thought on my ways*, that is, I examined my life, and called my ſelf to a ſtrict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the Law of God the rule and meaſure of my duty, and conſidered how far I had obeyed that Law or offended againſt it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in compariſon of what I might and ought to have done: That by this means I might come to underſtand the true ſtate and condition of my ſoul, and diſcerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiſs,

and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it must needs be a thing of excellent use, for men to set apart some particular times for the examination of themselves, that they may know how accounts stand between God and them. *Pythagoras* (or whoever was the Author of those *golden verses* which pass under his name) doth especially recommend this practice to his Scholars, every night before they slept, to call themselves to account for the actions of the day past; enquiring wherein they had transgressed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this no doubt is an admirable means to improve men in virtue, a most effectual way to keep our consciences continually waking and tender, and to make us stand in awe of our selves, and afraid to sin, when we know before hand that we must give so severe an account to our selves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wisdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may

may in ſome meaſure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppreſſed and confounded by the inſupportable weight of the ſins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worſt time, when we are ſick and weak, and have neither underſtanding nor leiſure to recollect our ſelves, and to call our ſins diſtinctly to remembrance, much leſs to exerciſe any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in Religion when our Reaſon is once departed from us; then darkneſs hath overtaken us indeed, and *the night is come when no man can work.* But though we were never ſo ſenſible, and ſhould do all we can at that time, yet after all this, how it will go with us God alone knows. I am ſure it is too much preſumption for any man to be confident that one general and confuſed act of repentance will ſerve his turn for the ſins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reaſon why we ſhould often examine our ſelves, both in order to the

amendment of our lives, and the eaſe of our conſciences when we come to dye.

2. This *thinking of our ways* may particularly and ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of our lives: *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them ſeriouſly to heart; I conſidered all the circumſtances and conſequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reaſoning the matter throughly with my ſelf, came to a peremptory and fixed reſolution of breaking off this wicked courſe of life, and betaking my ſelf to the obedience of God's Laws. And the *conſideration of our ways* taken in this ſenſe (which ſeems to be the more probable meaning of the Words) may reaſonably imply in it theſe following particulars.

1. The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and ſorrow for them;

them; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid them ſadly to heart.

3. A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe.

4. A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this courſe.

6. An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of doing this.

1. *The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.* And to this end, we may do well to reflect particularly upon the ſeveral ſtages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at leaſt the principal miſcarriages belonging to each of them. And the better to enable us hereto, it will be uſeful to have before our eyes ſome abridgement or ſummary of the Laws of God, containing the chief heads of duties and ſins, of virtues and vices; For this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwiſe perhaps would have been forgotten by

by us. We ſhould likewiſe conſider the ſeveral relations wherein we have ſtood to others, and how far we have tranſgreſſed or failed of our duty in any of thoſe reſpects.

And having thus far made up our ſad account, we may in a great meaſure underſtand the number and greatneſs of our ſins; abating for ſome particulars which are ſlipp'd out of our memory, and for ſins of ignorance, and dayly infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may ſee, what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been: eſpecially if we take into conſideration the ſeveral heavy circumſtances of our ſins, which do above meaſure aggravate them; the heinouſneſs of many of them, as to their nature, and the injurious conſequences of them to the perſon, or eſtate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed againſt the clear knowledg of our duty, againſt the frequent checks and convictions of our conſciences, telling us when we did them that we did amiſs; againſt ſo many motions

tions and ſuggeſtions of Gods Holy Spirit, ſo many admonitions and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own moſt ſerious vows and reſolutions, renewed at ſeveral times, eſpecially upon the receiving of the bleſſed Sacrament, and in times of ſickneſs and diſtreſs: and all this notwithſtanding the plaineſt declarations of Gods will to the contrary, notwithſtanding the terrors of the Lord and the wrath of God revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men; notwithſtanding the cruel ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins, and the moſt merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood: Add to this the ſcandal of our wicked lives to our holy Religion, the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others, the affront of them to the Divine Authority, and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy and goodneſs and patience of God, to which we have ſuch infinite obligations. Thus we ſhould ſet our ſins in order before our eyes, with the ſeveral aggravations of them.

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2. A hearty *trouble* and *ſorrow* for ſin; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid my ſins ſadly to heart. And ſurely whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and ſenſibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and ſmite upon our breaſts, and be in pain and heavineſs at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not ſay that tears are abſolutely neceſſary to repentance, but they do very well become it; and a thorough ſenſe of ſin will almoſt melt the moſt hard and obdurate diſpoſition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be ſure, the conſideration of our ways ſhould cauſe inward trouble and confuſion in our minds. The leaſt we can do when we have done amiſs, is to be ſorry for it, to condemn our own folly, and to be full of indignation and diſpleaſure againſt our ſelves for what we have done, and to reſolve never to do the like again. And let us make ſure that our trouble and ſorrow for

for ſin have this effect, *to make us leave our ſins*; and then we ſhall need to be the leſs ſolicitous about the degrees and outward expreſſions of it.

3. *A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe.* That ſin is the ſtain and blemiſh of our natures, the reproach of our reaſon and underſtanding, the diſeaſe and the deformity of our ſouls, the great enemy of our peace, the cauſe of all our fears and troubles: That whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the cleareſt dictates of our reaſon and conſcience, to our plain and true intereſt, and to the ſtrongeſt tyes and obligations of duty and gratitude. And which renders it yet more unreaſonable, ſin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themſelves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no; a man may be poor or ſick by misfortune, but no man is wicked and vitious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakneſs, by ſuffering our ſelves to be hurried away by every fooliſh

luſt and paſſion, to do things which we know to be prejudicial and hurtful to our ſelves; and ſo baſe and unworthy in themſelves, that we are aſhamed to do them, not only in the preſence of a wiſe man, but even of a child or a fool. So that if ſin were followed with no other puniſhment, beſides the guilt of having done a ſhameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himſelf a fool and a beaſt; one would not be falſe and unjuſt, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reaſon, yet out of meer greatneſs and generoſity of mind, out of reſpect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reaſon and underſtanding. For let Witty men ſay what they will in defence of their vices, there are ſo many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of ſin, that the matter is paſt all denial: Men are generally galled and uneaſie at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it; they are aſhamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided

braided with it; and 'tis very obſervable, that though the greater part of the world was always bad, and vice hath ever had more ſervants and followers to cry it up, yet never was there any Age ſo degenerate, in which Vice could get the better of Virtue in point of general eſteem and reputation: Even they whoſe wills have been moſt enſlaved to ſin, could never yet ſo far bribe and corrupt their underſtandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. *A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life.* And theſe are ſo ſad and dreadful, and the danger of them ſo evident, and ſo perpetually threatning us, that no temptation can be ſufficient to excuſe a man to himſelf and his own reaſon for venturing upon them. A principal point of wiſdom is to look to the End of things; not only to conſider the preſent pleaſure and advantage of any thing, but alſo the ill conſequences of it for the future; and to ballance them one againſt the other.

Now ſin in its own nature tends to

make men miſerable. It certainly cauſes trouble and diſquiet of mind: And to a conſiderate man, that knows how to value the eaſe and ſatisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument againſt ſin, than to conſider that the forſaking of it is the only way to find reſt to our ſouls.

Beſides this, every vice is naturally attended with ſome particular miſchief and inconvenience, which maketh it even in this life a puniſhment to it ſelf; and commonly, the providence of God and his juſt judgment upon ſinners ſtrikes in to heighten the miſchievous conſequences of a ſinful courſe. This we have repreſented in the Parable of the Prodigal; his riotous courſe of life did naturally and of it ſelf bring him to want, but the providence of God likewiſe concurred to render his condition more miſerable, *at the ſame time there aroſe a mighty famine in the land*; ſo that he did not only want wherewithall to ſupply himſelf, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and ſuperfluity of others.

others. Sin brings many miſeries upon us, and God many times ſends more and greater than ſin brings; and the further we go on in a ſinful courſe, the more miſeries and the greater difficulties we involve our ſelves in.

But all theſe are but light and inconſiderable, in compariſon of the dreadful miſeries of another world; to the danger whereof, every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expoſe himſelf. So that if we could conquer ſhame, and had ſtupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our conſciences for them, and the temporal miſchiefs and inconveniences of them; though for the preſent gratifying of our luſts we could brook and diſpence with all theſe, yet the conſideration of the end and iſſue of a ſinful courſe, is an invincible objection againſt it, and never to be anſwered; though the violence of our ſenſual appetites and inclinations ſhould be able to bear down all temporal conſiderations whatſoever, yet methinks the intereſt of

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our everlaſting happineſs ſhould lye near our hearts, the conſideration of another world ſhould mightily amaze and ſtartle us; the horrors of eternal darkneſs, and the diſmal thought of being miſerable for ever, ſhould effectually diſcourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the ſinner, and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to ſurprize him the next moment. And can we make too much haſte, to fly from ſo great and apparent a danger? When will we think of ſaving our ſelves, if not when (for ought we know) we are upon the very brink of ruine, and juſt ready to drop into deſtruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows, *a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe.* And Neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than perſwade: And after it is once evident leaves no place for further deliberation. And the greater the neceſſity is, it is ſtill the more cogent argument. For whatever is neceſſary, is ſo in order to ſome end; and the

the greater the end, the greater is the neceſſity of the means without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and laſt end of all Reaſonable creatures is happineſs, and therefore whatever is neceſſary in order to that, hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs, till we have left our ſins, for *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always enforce a preſent change; becauſe men hope they may continue in their ſins, and remedy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects, that there is no venturing upon it: And in matters of greateſt concernment wiſe men will run no hazards, if they can help it. *David* was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life for one moment; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* *This* day, *this* hour, for ought we know, may

may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore we ſhould make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate, as *Lot* did out of *Sodom*, leſt fire and brimſtone overtake us. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the next moment, hath a great deal of reaſon to ſeize upon the preſent opportunity. While we are *lingering* in our ſins, if God be not merciful to us, we ſhall be conſumed. Therefore *make haſte*, ſinner, and *eſcape for thy life, leſt evil overtake thee.*

6. Laſtly, *An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of making this change.* God who deſigned us for happineſs at firſt, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by ſin, was pleaſed to reſtore us again to the capacity of it by the Redemption of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, hath made nothing neceſſary to our happineſs that is impoſſible for us to do; either of our ſelves, or by the aſſiſtance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is poſſible to us, which we may do by the aſſiſtance of another, if we may have that

that aſſiſtance for asking: And God hath promiſed to *give his holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So that notwithſtanding the great corruption and weakneſs of our natures, ſince the grace of God which brings ſalvation hath appeared, it is not abſolutely out of our power to leave our ſins, and to turn to God: For that may truly be ſaid to be in our power, which God hath promiſed to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our ſelves.

So that there is nothing on Gods part to hinder this change. He hath ſolemnly declared, that he ſincerely deſires it, and that he is ready to aſſiſt our good reſolutions to this purpoſe. And moſt certainly, when he tells us, that *he hath no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledg of the truth*; that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance*, He means plainly as he ſaith, and doth not ſpeak to us with any

private reſerve or nice diſtinction between his ſecret and revealed will, that is, he doth not decree one thing and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a ſinner entertain ſerious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive him! This is, in a very lively manner, deſcribed to us in the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*, who when he was returning home, and *was yet a great way off*, what haſte doth his Father make to meet him? *he ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran.* And if there be no impediment on Gods part, why ſhould there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty ſhould be on the other ſide, Whether God would be pleaſed to ſhew mercy to ſuch great offenders as we have been. But the buſineſs doth not ſtick there. And will we be miſerable by our own choice, when the grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the *firſt* thing, The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of

of his life; *I thought on my ways.* I proceed to the

II. *The ſucceſs of this courſe.* It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation. *I turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And if we conſider the matter throughly, and have but patience to reaſon out the caſe with our ſelves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to ſome iſſue, the concluſion muſt naturally be, the quitting of that evil and dangerous courſe in which we have lived. For ſin and conſideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men conſider what ſin is, they would have ſo many unanſwerable objections againſt it, ſuch ſtrong fears and jealouſies of the miſerable iſſue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not ſay, that this change is perfectly made at once. A ſtate of ſin and holineſs are not like two Ways that are juſt parted by a line, ſo as a man may ſtep out of the one full into the other; but they are like two Ways that lead to

two very diſtant places, and conſequently are at a good diſtance from one another, and the further any man hath travelled in the one, the further he is from the other; ſo that it requires time and pains to paſs from the one to the other. It ſometimes ſo happens, that ſome perſons are by a mighty conviction and reſolution, and by a very extraordinary and over-powering degree of Gods grace, almoſt perfectly reclaimed from their ſins at once, and all of a ſudden *tranſlated out of the Kingdom of darkneſs into the Kingdom of his dear Son.* And thus it was with many of the firſt Converts to Chriſtianity; as their prejudices againſt the Chriſtian Religion were ſtrong and violent, ſo the holy Spirit of God was pleaſed to work mightily in them that believed. But in the uſual and ſettled methods of Gods grace, evil habits are maſtered and ſubdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict, and many times after they are routed they rally and make head again; and 'tis a great while before the contrary habits of grace and vir-

virtue are grown up to any conſiderable degree of ſtrength and maturity, and before a man come to that confirmed ſtate of goodneſs, that he may be ſaid to have conquered and mortified his luſts. But yet this ought not to diſcourage us. For ſo ſoon as we have ſeriouſly begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we purſue our advantages, we ſhall every day gain ground, and the work will grow eaſier upon our hands; and we who moved at firſt with ſo much ſlowneſs and difficulty, ſhall after a while be enabled to run the ways of Gods commandments with pleaſure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded to ſpeak to from theſe words, The *courſe* here preſcribed, and the *ſucceſs* of it. And now to perſwade men to take this Courſe, I ſhall offer two or three Arguments.

1. That Conſideration is the proper act of Reaſonable creatures. This argument

God

God himſelf uſes, to bring men to a conſideration of their evil ways, *Iſa.* 46. 8, *Remember, and ſhew your ſelves men; bring it again to mind, O ye tranſgreſſors.* To conſider our ways, and to call our ſins to remembrance, is to ſhew our ſelves men. 'Tis the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their preſent inclinations and appetites, without any conſideration of the future conſequences of things, and without fear of any thing, but of a preſent and ſenſible danger; like Brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view, and juſt ready to fall upon them: Whereas to a prudent and conſiderate man, a good or evil in reverſion is capable of as true an eſtimation, proportionably to the greatneſs and diſtance of it, as if it were really preſent. And what do we think has God given us our reaſon and underſtandings for, but to foreſee evils at a diſtance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future ſecurity and happineſs, to look up *to God our Maker, who hath taught us more*

more than the Beaſts of the earth, and made us wiſer than the Fowls of heaven; but to conſider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes moſt for our true and laſting intereſt, and what againſt it? What can a Beaſt do worſe, than to act without any conſideration and deſign, than to purſue his preſent inclination without any apprehenſion of future danger? The moſt dull and ſtupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exerciſe leſs reaſon than this comes to. So that for a man not to conſider his ways, is to the very beſt intents and purpoſes, to be *without underſtanding, and like the beaſts that periſh.*

2. This is the end of Gods patience and long-ſuffering towards us, to bring us to conſideration. The great deſign of Gods *goodneſs*, is to *lead men to repentance. He winks at the ſins of men, that they may repent.* He bears long with us, and delays the puniſhment of our ſins, and doth not execute judgment ſpeedily, becauſe he is loth to ſurprize men into deſtruction; becauſe he would give them the liberty of ſecond thoughts, time

to

to reflect upon themſelves, and to conſider what they have done, and to reaſon themſelves into repentance. *Conſider this all ye that forget God, leſt* his patience turn into fury, and *he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

3. Conſideration is that which we muſt all come to, one time or other. Time will come, when we ſhall conſider and cannot help it; when we ſhall not be able to divert our thoughts from thoſe things, which we are now ſo loth to think upon. Our conſciences will take their opportunity, to bring our ways to remembrance; when ſome great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the Prodigal, when he was brought to the very laſt extremity, and *was ready to periſh for hunger*, then *he came to himſelf.* When we come to dye, then we ſhall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; And how glad would we then be, that we had time to conſider them? And perhaps while we are wiſhing for more time, Eternity will ſwallow us up. To be ſure, in the other world,

world, a great part of the miſery of wicked men will conſiſt in furious reflections upon themſelves, and the evil actions of their lives. 'Tis ſaid of the *Rich* voluptuous man in the *Parable*, that *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments*; as if he had never conſidered and bethought himſelf till that time. But alas! it will then be too late to conſider: For then conſideration will do us no good; it will ſerve to no other purpoſe, but to aggravate our miſery, and to multiply our ſtings, and to give new life and rage to thoſe Vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiſer courſe would it be, to conſider theſe things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them, while we may redreſs them, and avoid the diſmal conſequences of them, than when our caſe is deſperate and paſt remedy?

And now what can I ſay more, to perſwade every one of us to a conſideration of our *own ways?* We are generally apt to buſie our ſelves in obſerving the errors

and miſcarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and cenſure the faults and follies of other men; but how few deſcend into themſelves, and turn their eyes inward, and ſay, *What have I done?* 'Tis an excellent ſaying of *Antoninus* the great *Emperour* and *Philoſopher*, *No man was ever unhappy, for not prying into the actions and condition of other men; but that man is neceſſarily unhappy, who doth not obſerve himſelf, and conſider the ſtate of his own ſoul.*

This is our proper work; and *now* is a proper ſeaſon for it, when we pretend to God and men to ſet apart a ſolemn time for the examination of our ſelves, and for a ſerious review of our lives, in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiſs. And though we would venture to diſſemble with men, yet let us not diſſemble with God alſo: *For ſhall not he that pondereth the heart conſider it, and he that keepeth thy ſoul, ſhall not he know it; and ſhall not he render to every man according to his ways?*

I know

I know it is a very unpleaſant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally ſo backward to it; becauſe it will of neceſſity give ſome preſent diſturbance to their minds. They whoſe lives have been very vicious, are ſo odious a ſight, ſo horrid a ſpectacle to themſelves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate Conſideration, and are ready to ſay to it, as the evil Spirit did in the Goſpel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cauſe at preſent, it is the only way to prevent the anguiſh and the torments of Eternity.

The things which I have offered to your conſideration, are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and eſtates, but that which is more truly your ſelves, your immortal ſouls, the deareſt and moſt durable part of your ſelves: and they do not

concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore beſpeak your moſt ſerious regard to them, in the words of *Moſes* to the People of *Iſrael*, after he had ſet the Law of God before them, together with the bleſſings promiſed to obedience, and the terrible curſes threatned to the tranſgreſſion of it, *Deut.* 32. 46. *Set your hearts to the words which I teſtifie to you this day, for it is not a vain thing, becauſe it is your life.* *Your life*, your *eternal life* and happineſs depends upon it.

And beſides a tender regard to your ſelves and your own intereſts, which methinks every man, out of a natural deſire of being happy and dread of being miſerable, ſhould be forward enough to conſider: Be pleaſed likewiſe to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I ſpeak now to a great many Perſons, the eminence of whoſe rank and quality renders their examples ſo powerful, as to be able almoſt to give authority either to Virtue or Vice. People take their faſhions from you, as to the habits

habits of their minds as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefely depends the ruine or reformation of manners, our hopes or deſpair of a better world. What way ſoever you go, you are followed by troops. If you run any ſinful or dangerous courſe, you cannot *periſh alone in your iniquity*, but *thouſands will fall by your ſide, and ten thouſands at your right hands:* And on the contrary, 'tis very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and deſigns, to be the ſovereign reſtorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate Age. It is *our* part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but 'tis *you* that would be the powerful and effectual Preachers of righteouſneſs: We may endeavour to make men proſelytes to virtue, but you would infallibly draw diſciples after you: We may try to perſwade, but you could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to reſtrain them from being ſo bad.

Therefore conſider your ways, for the ſake of others as well as your ſelves. Conſider what you have done, and then conſider what

what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of theſe things. And to help you forward in this work, it is not neceſſary that I ſhould rip up the vices of the Age, and ſet mens ſins in order before them. It is much better, that you your ſelves ſhould call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful Monitor and Witneſs in our own breaſts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this Monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God, to make his admonitions effectual.

Let us then every one of us, in the fear of God, *ſearch and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.* Let us *take to our ſelves words, and ſay* to God, with thoſe true Penitents in Scripture, *I have ſinned, what ſhall be done unto thee, O thou preſerver of men? Behold, I am vile, what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor my ſelf, and repent in duſt and aſhes.* For *ſurely it is meet to be ſaid unto God, I will not offend*

offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me, and if I have done iniquity I will do no more. O that there were ſuch an heart in us! O that we were wiſe, that we underſtood this, that we would conſider our later end! And God, of his infinite mercy, inſpire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy reſolution; for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*